DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 307 810 FL 017 999

AUTHOR	Simich-Dudgeon, Carmen; And Others
TITLE	Helping Limited English Proficient Children Communicate in the Classroom: A Handbook for Teachers. Program Information Guide Series, Number 9.
INSTITUTION	National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, Wheaton, MD.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	89
CONTRACT	300860069
NOTE	27p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 8737 Colesville Rd., Suite 900, Silver Spring, MD 20910.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Classroom Communication; Classroom Environment; Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; *Limited English Speaking; Resource Units; *Teacher Response; Teacher Student Relationship; *Teaching Models; *Verbal Communication

ABSTRACT

This handbook for teachers highlights issues related to the verbal participation of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students in the classroom, and provides suggestions for encouraging and integrating LEP students more fully into the ongoing verbal interaction in the regular classroom. The handbook's suggestions are based on the results of a 3-year collaborative study between the Center for Applied Linguistics and Fairfax (Virginia) County Public Schools which sought (1) to identify significant features in the responses of students who were identified by their teachers as "successful communicators/responders" during acadedmic verbal interaction, and (2) to translate these findings into teacher strategies that promote language and cognitive growth. The handbook focuses primarily on the use of language by students and teachers during verbal review, the time during the lesson when the teacher asks questions about material previously taught. The handbook is organized into two major sections, each containing short "capsules" that summarize the research results and present suggestions for classroom use. Many of the suggestions include examples of dialogue between a student and a teacher. The first section presents some general ideas for structuring classroom interaction and outlines specific strategies for making classroom interaction expectations more explicit. The second section presents specific strategies for dealing with the special problems of LEP students. (JD)

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Helping Limited English Proficient Children Communicate in the Classroom

A Handbook for Teachers

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FL 017999

Program Information Guide Series **Winter 1988/89**

National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education **Number 9**

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Preface

Program Information Guides are submitted to NCBE by practitioners involved in teacher education, research, and the education of language minority students. These guides are intended to be practical resource guides on innovative teaching practices in the education of limited English proficient (LEP) students. Other titles in this series include:

Developing Literacy in English as a Second Language: Guidelines for Teachers of Young Children from Non-Literate Backgrounds

Cooperative Learning: Integrating Language and Content-Area Instruction

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the administrators and teachers in the Fairfax County Public Schools, Fairfax, Virginia, without whose cooperation this project would not have been possible:

Dr. Esther Eisenhower, Coordinator, English as a Second Language;

Dr. Claudia Chaille, Chairman, Research Screening Committee;

Mrs. Emily Williams, former Principal, Parklawn Elementary School;

Mrs. Roberta Mahoney, former Principal, Belvedere Elementary School;

Ms. Marie Baglio, Grade 3 teacher, Belvedere Elementary School;

Ms. Saralynn Bowling, Grade 3 teacher, Belvedere Elementary School;

Mrs. Sue Hartman, Grade 6 teacher, Parklawn Elementary School;

Mrs. Sue Kraft, Grade 3 teacher, Parklawn Elementary School;

Mrs. Marjorie Naidorf, Grade 3 teacher, Parklawn Elementary School;

Mr. William Rippe, Grade 6 teacher, Belvedere Elementary School;

Mrs. Jane Smith, Grade 6 teacher, Parklawn Elementary School;

Ms. Valorie Sweat, Grade 6 teacher, Parklawn Elementary School.

Special thanks go to Mrs. Hartman, Mrs. Naidorf, Mr. Rippe, and Ms. Sweat for their helpful comments on an earlier draft. This guide has also benefited from the review and comments from the following professionals: Dr. G. Richard Tucker, President; Dr. Donna Christian, Co-Director of Research; Dr. George Spanos, Research Associate; and Peg Lorenz, Consultant, all of the Center for Applied Linguistics.

Last but not least, we want to thank all the parents who gave us permission to work with their children, and the children themselves who allowed us to come into their classes and shared their academic experiences with us.

Introduction

This handbook is a resource for teachers who want to integrate limited English proficient (LEP) students more fully into the ongoing verbal interaction in the classroom. It highlights issues related to the verbal participation of LEP students and provides suggestions for encouraging them and helping them improve their oral skills.

The ideas in this handbook constitute applied findings which resulted from a collaboration between the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC, and Fairfax County Public Schools, a large suburban school district in northern Virginia. The study, entitled *Academic Language Talk: Significant Features in the Responses of Effective Communicators,* was a three-year study performed pursuant to a contract from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Department of Education, for the Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR). However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of OERI/ED and no official endorsement by OERI/ED should be inferred.

The two major goals of the research effort were to identify significant features in the responses of students identified by their teachers as "successful communicators/responders" during academic verbal interaction and to translate these findings into teacher strategies that promote language and cognitive development.

Seven third and sixth grade teachers collaborated on the project by inviting the researchers into their classrooms for observation of math and science lessons. Furthermore, they provided their own understanding about teaching and learning through question-answer sequences and their standards for questions and responses.

Children themselves were sources of much of the data, both during observations and during interviews. In interviews with them, we found that all children are aware of the characteristics of a "good" response during classroom interaction. They mentioned linguistic, cognitive, and interactive features. Linguistic features include using the "right words" and "speaking clearly." Cognitive features refer to answers that are "complete" and "show you know what you're talking about." Interactive features are turn-taking and behavioral characteristics of the effective responder, such as raising one's hand and showing confidence.

Classroom interactions (teacher questions and student responses) have instructional value for children. Children told us that they learn from listening to teachers' questions and other children's answers. This classroom interaction is of greatest value if it is structured so that all children know what is expected and are able to work with the teacher to build a collaborative response.

The language skills of LEP children (and, indeed, of all children) can be developed through techniques which make the social and instructional features of classroom language more clear. Limited English proficient children best succeed in a classroom where a routine is established and is clear to every student, so the rules for appropriate conduct are explicit and each student knows what is expected. They also do best when they are expected to contribute, but do not have to constantly compete for the teacher's attention. The most successful environment for LEP students is one where there is a balance between teacher-directed activities and individual and small group work, and where lessons are organized in a predictable fashion so that students know what to anticipate and how to focus their attention. Predictable consistency encourages LEP students to focus on the communication of information rather than on procedure or form.

Sometimes teachers assume that when LEP children are mainstreamed and appear to be fluent in English, they do not have communication difficulties, and any problems they have in school reflect cognitive or academic, rather than communication, problems. Research shows, however, that it takes longer to achieve competence with academic language than with casual conversational language. For this reason, explicit teaching of academic vocabulary as well as explicit teaching about what constitutes an effective academic question and response is very important for the LEP child.

Many teachers worry that making accommodations for LEP students means slowing down or watering down the content of their programs, with negative consequences for their native English speaking children. What we found, however, is that those classroom interactive practices which are helpful to LEP students are helpful to all students.

In fact, the suggestions we make in this handbook were practiced very frequently in the Gifted and Talented (GT) classrooms we observed as part of this study.

This handbook focuses primarily on the use of language by students and teachers during the classroom activity we call "verbal review." Verbal review is that time during the lesson when the teacher stops to ask questions about material previously taught. It is a time for children to find out what is important and to express new concepts in clear language.

We found that verbal reviews follow certain general patterns of organization. In the typically "good" verbal review, the teacher does the following:

1) captures the students' attention and redirects it *from* the previous lesson activity (experimentation, teacher presentation, seatwork) *to* the upcoming verbal review;

2) "frames" the verbal review, reminding students of the topic of the instructional unit, and also how this lesson or activity fits in with it;

3) begins with factual recall and factual description questions about the activity;

4) expands the discussion with questions which require students to:

- compare the behavior or characteristics of things being studied, and/or
- apply or generalize from the facts, and/or
- explain the math processes or scientific principles behind the facts; and

5) closes the discussion with a summary.

Verbal review has the potential to help students develop important skills in verbal academic language competence, such as describing, explaining, exemplifying, comparing, and relating real events to abstract principles. All too often, however, the opportunity is missed, because students are not encouraged to go beyond one- or two-word responses. Teachers should try to refrain from doing all the work in verbal review discussions by following these guidelines:

- Avoid fill-in-the-blank questions in favor of questions requiring descriptions or comparisons. Rather than ask "The fourth planet from the sun is what?", ask "Who can compare the positions of the Earth and Mars in the solar system?" Both questions check essentially the same factual learning, but the latter also gives the student the opportunity to develop his/her communicative competence. If such questions have been given as part of a seatwork or homework assignment, or have been gone over in small-group or partner discussions, LEP students are given a fairer chance of succeeding in answering them.

- Give students more time than usual to think through challenging questions. Comparisons, generalizations, and explanations are difficult to formulate well, and research has shown that if teachers wait three seconds for a response (instead of the usual one-second wait), they get more responses and better responses.

This handbook is organized into two major sections, each containing short "capsules" that summarize the research results and present suggestions for classroom use. Many of these suggestions include examples of dialogue between a teacher and a student. The teacher's statements are denoted by "*T:*"; the student's responses by "*S:*". The first section presents some general ideas for structuring classroom interaction and outlines strategies for making classroom interaction expectations more explicit. The second section presents specific strategies for dealing with the special problems of LEP children.

Capsule 1: WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

"Look at the next page. This is a review of metrics. You're going to be doing some problem-solving and writing your answers." (third grade teacher)

ISSUE

Being "on task" requires different behavior in different situations, including active involvement in a science experiment, attentive listening during teacher presentations, or oral participation during verbal reviews. Some students, especially students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, may be willing and able to be "on task," but do not understand the particular demands of each situation. Students need to know when to pay attention and how to participate. The teacher can help by providing clear signals about the goals and rules for interaction in different lesson activities by letting students know what you expect them to do and how you expect them to do it.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Mark transitions between activities very clearly. Identify the activity by name, and explain how it will be accomplished. For example,

T: Now, first we're going to review your homework answers, and then I'm going to ask you some questions about it. Then we'll start on today's lesson.

Model the thinking process you want students to use, "talking through" the steps one at a time.

In order to do well, students have to know "what's going on here and what is my responsibility?" To help them answer these questions, discuss with them the different types of questions you ask and the times during the lesson that lead to different purposes for your questions. For example, during instructional activities, questions are most often used to involve students in a discovery approach to learning. Students are not held responsible for providing the "right" response, but instead are encouraged to provide opinions and make guesses while they learn new concepts and skills. On the other hand, during verbal review or "quiz" time, questions are asked to determine if students have learned what has been taught, and they are held responsible for a specific correct answer. Understanding these differences may help students be more active participants.

Throughout the lesson activities, "signposts" should be used to guide students to successful completion of the tasks (see Capsule 4, NOW, WHERE WERE WE?).

Closing activities explicitly is as important as marking the opening. Use a summary of what has transpired to help students clarify what you have done and what they should have learned (see Capsule 13, WRAPPING IT UP).

Capsule 2: WHY ASK QUESTIONS?

"When the teacher asks questions it's good because if someone didn't know something they could just listen and the others would tell them." (third grade student)

ISSUE

Teachers ask questions to find out what students know, but questions and answers also fulfill another function in the classroom. They help students to clarify concepts and deepen their understanding of lesson content by listening and volunteering responses.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Be aware of the instructional function of questions and answers to make sure that the concepts you are teaching are verbalized clearly. This gives children another chance to learn through the interaction.

Be aware that your question, while addressed to and answered by an individual, is useful for the whole class. As one sixth grade student said, "Teachers ask questions mainly to teach the class so if somebody in the class does know, it will help the other people in the class who don't know. It's not actually for individuals -- more like for the whole class." Repeat and rephrase students' responses so they are heard and understood by all students. LEP students say that even though they might not raise their hands and actively participate in the discussion, they learn a great deal from questions and answers.

Ask questions often during the lesson. Use questions and answers to summarize what has been learned at each step. "Why" and "how" questions give students the opportunity to explain their answers and their thinking. For example:

"Why do you think I asked you to do this?"
"What was the purpose of this?"
"Can you tell us what that means?"

Allow many children to participate. When more children participate, a "good answer" is developed collaboratively, and topics are discussed more fully. This increases the instructional potential of verbal review.

Allow the children plenty of opportunities to speak -- and listen carefully to learn more about what they understand and where they need further instruction. Use questions to give students an opportunity to describe what they have learned, gain confidence in themselves, and come to conclusions. Questions and answers are a time for thinking and talking together.

Use follow-up questions to allow a student to revise an incorrect answer rather than going immediately to another child. One sixth grade "unsuccessful" responder told us, "When you don't know and someone else is called on who does, you don't learn because you're not listening." This indicates that a successful response should be built from the unsuccessful attempt if the instructional value of verbal reviews is to be promoted.

Capsule 3: HOW DO TEACHERS KNOW THAT KIDS KNOW?

"They (LEP students) feel like they know how to do it but they don't know how to say it." (third grade teacher)

ISSUE

Children who do not frequently participate in question and answer exchanges (often LEP students or the less confident students) are unable to "show their smarts." Teachers cannot involve all students equally due to time and other limitations on participation. We know that those students who are outspoken and raise their hands frequently participate more than others. Teachers should develop verbal review activities which increase LEP students' participation, increase the instructional value of oral reviews, and "democratize" oral reviews by minimizing student differences in "verbal performance" and maximizing the focus on content knowledge.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Conduct your oral reviews in small groups as well as large ones. Change the composition of the small groups so that students who rarely participate are sometimes grouped together, and at other times are grouped with more active students.

Tell students in advance what questions you will review with them. Be sure LEP students understand the questions (see Capsule 14, WHAT IF I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE CHILD'S ENGLISH?). Then give the students time to organize and plan their answers in small groups of LEP and native English speaking students. This gives them a chance to discuss related topics and issues and increases their verbal participation.

Increase the instructional value of verbal reviews by extending the discussion beyond the one-word answer. Ask students to give reasons for their views and provide evidence for their answers. Encourage other students to ask questions and contribute to answers.

Plan your verbal review in two stages: first ask questions about content knowledge and the information that has been taught to clarify the topic. Then "recycle" the review and extend your questioning to expand the topic and give students the opportunity to relate what they have learned to broader questions and to predict the next step in learning.

Use plenty of visual aids. Write on the blackboard and demonstrate whenever possible. This helps students with limited English proficiency as well as those who learn best through a visual modality.

Allow students to respond non-verbally, by pointing to a location on a map, adding a feature to a diagram, or demonstrating a calculation at the blackboard. Then build that into a verbal response.

Allow the child enough time to give an answer. As one teacher told us, "sometimes when you allow the student time to explain his/her thinking you can unscramble the confusion and get an effective response." Research shows that waiting three seconds after you ask a question and before you respond to the student's answer will lead to higher quality responses.

Capsule 4: NOW, WHERE WERE WE?

"All right, ah, this is the kind of problem we are going to be doing in our second objective. We are going to multiply a two-digit number by a one-digit number." (third grade teacher)

ISSUE

The successful verbal review is cohesive, with teacher and student contributions fitting together clearly, and new topics linked to the ongoing discussion. Students do cooperate in this, but it is the teacher who is primarily responsible for managing a cohesive verbal review. One important way experienced teachers do this is by providing frequent "signposts," or focus-of-attention words, as in the example quoted above, which keep the class informed of where they have been, and where they are going.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

In planning the verbal review, identify places where "signposts" will be needed. These include every place where the discussion changes direction.

At the beginning:

"Before we go over the homework, let's review what we have to do when we add or subtract fractions. Let's look at this problem."

When you give or ask for an example:

"Okay, everybody, ah, let's think a little bit about the word 'float.' When you go fishing, what makes that fishing line stay up?"

When you return to the main point after talking about a subpoint:

"Now, we're going to look at our objective, to find out the next step in our sequence after multiplying. What is it, Terry?"

When you resume the verbal review after the class has worked an example or a set of problems:

"All right. We matched the term 'prediction' with its definition, 'telling what you think will happen'. Now, what did you have for 'buoyancy'?"

When you shift from talking about specific examples to talking about general principles:

"So, we've seen that you used foil boats, you used clay boats, you used a paper bag with air, and without air. What is it about these things that makes them float?"

Focus students' attention on your "signposts" by using focus-of-attention words and phrases such as **okay, all right, now, so,** and **well,** spoken with some emphasis (slightly louder and either slower or faster than you had been talking). The examples above all include focus-of-attention markers which help keep students "on task" and paying attention.

These techniques work together with those for summarizing the discussion (see Capsule 13, WRAPPING IT UP).

Capsule 5: THE "RIGHT" WORDS

"I think when you're asking questions you're looking for something in pa.'icular...and until someone says the right words, you're just soliciting from everybody." (third grade teacher)

ISSUE

Students need to learn the "right" words to use in answering teachers' questions. Vocabulary should be presented and practiced so that as students learn concepts, they also learn the words they need to express those concepts. This is especially important for LEP students who may not know common words that other children know, or their range of meaning and use.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Identify new and important vocabulary related to each new lesson. Write these words on the board or display them on a wall chart in the classroom. Provide concrete connections, whenever possible, to help students remember new words through visual, auditory, or other sensory cues.

Help students understand the meanings of words by using them in meaningful contexts. Here's an example of how a teacher effectively provides a definition for a word in the workbook.

T: The first question says: "Name the properties used to describe the powders." We didn't call them properties, but what words did we use to describe the powders? Eric?
S: Color, shape, smell...(teacher writes these on the board)
T: These things are the properties of the powders....

Guide your students in using the correct terms. By using the correct words, students will better remember the concepts you are teaching.

S: ...because the soap makes the water heavy?
T: Is heavy a good word to use for that? When something flattens that way, what kind of power do we say it has?
S: Adhesive force?
T: Good.

Don't restrict yourself to "simple" words when talking with LEP students. Allow your language to be rich, but use synonyms often, so that the student who doesn't recognize one word may recognize another word for the same thing.

T: What did you find out about powder number six? Leah?
T: What did you discover about powder number nine? Terry?

Use diagrams or charts to show visually the relationships among terms, events, or steps.

Capsule 6: SAYING IT "THE RIGHT WAY"

"He'll know what it is, but he can't actually say it out and sometimes that happens with people who do know English, you know, it's just that you can't phrase it right." (sixth grade student)

ISSUE

Although teachers say that they listen for the student's meaning, it is clear from what children said that if they do not express a concept in the way the teacher expects, the teacher may not understand. Try to separate form from content; an answer might be correct, but said "wrong."

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Listen for the meaning of the student's answer. Sometimes teachers listen for a particular word or phrase and do not recognize correct answers when given in a form that is unexpected. Try to be open to each answer and consider what the child is contributing to the discussion, even if the answer takes the discussion in a different direction than you had intended.

When you recognize that a student is having difficulty expressing a correct answer coherently, acknowledge the basic correctness of the response. Then rephrase the response and/or re-direct the question to another student.

T: What is the most important thing to remember?
S: Put the zero,...you times...
T: (To the whole class) I know what she means and you know what she means -- who can say it another way?

Don't be distracted by non-standard grammar when listening for content. One sixth grade student told us "...you say it in the wrong way but you be right, and she don't quite understand what you are saying." Dialect should not be a factor in your evaluation of student responses in content areas. Just as with grammatical errors by LEP students (see Capsule 17, WHAT ABOUT GRAMMAR?), these responses should be accepted for their correct **content**. As you work with students with non-standard dialects, you will come to understand their intentions and meanings when they are expressed in nonstandard forms.

Children have different styles of organizing their answers. We expect responses to be **topic-centered,** and most are. Another organizational style which you may encounter is the **topic-associating** style, which makes use of parallelism, analogy, and other associations between seemingly unrelated things. When you expect a topic-centered response, but get a topic-associating response, it may seem muddled or even incoherent. In such cases, probe for connections among the points the student wants to make to clarify whether the student is "packaging" pertinent and valid information differently, or is just plain "off-base." As one teacher put it, "You know, it's a whole lot easier to get them to make the connections clear, if you assume that the connections are there in the first place."*

*Quoted in "Narrative presentations: An oral preparation for literacy with first graders," by Sarah Michaels, in *The Social Construction of Literacy*, edited by Jenny Cook-Gumperz, pp. 94- 116. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Capsule 7: TALKING ABOUT NUMBERS

"There is only one correct answer in math operations." (third grade teacher)

ISSUE

Because the typical math problem has only one correct answer, question-answer exchanges during math tend to be very short and allow the students little opportunity for talk. We know, however, that talk during math instruction can help students to understand concepts and procedures and to develop the language skills they need to communicate and extend mathematical ideas.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Ask questions that will encourage talk during math instruction. Even though there is only one correct answer, many questions can lead the child to that answer.

"Why did you choose that operation?"
"What key words in the problem might help you?"
"How will you do the work?"
"Can you estimate an answer? Does your estimate sound sensible?"
"How will you know? Where can you look? What do you need to know?"
"Can you check your answer? How?"

Ask students to explain the process they have gone through when they get a wrong answer. Often, merely explaining the difficulty they are having will help them see where they have gone wrong. The act of expressing their thoughts aloud in words helps students clarify and organize their thoughts.

Ask children to "talk" as they work at the blackboard, describing what they are doing. Or have them work together in pairs, explaining the processes they go through to solve math problems.

Ask one child to tell another student who is at the blackboard exactly what to write and what the next step is. This helps them verbalize mathematical processes.

Remove yourself from the role of saying whether each answer is correct or not. A technique we have seen used successfully to accomplish this follows:

T: Number seven, Jeff?
S: Thirty-eight.
T: Anyone else get that?

Ask students to compose original word problems applying the math concepts they have learned.

As in other subject areas, use synonyms to expand your students' vocabulary and to aid the LEP child in comprehending what you are saying. Example:

T: So you say we can reduce the fraction four-eighths, because two can go into four and eight. Four and eight are divisible by two. Four and eight can be divided by two.

Capsule 8: DEVELOPING SCIENTISTS

"ESL students love science, because it's hands-on." (third grade teacher)

ISSUE

Hands-on activities in science can provide a springboard for a well-structured verbal review. When a verbal review directly follows the experimental activity, the experienced teacher will often begin with factual recall and factual description questions about what the students have just been doing. Then, questioning can be expanded to issues of comparison, and the explanation of the causes of what the students observed, or the principles being illustrated by the experiment. The expansion of the verbal review into questions of comparisons and causes is an important means of linking the hands-on activities to their science concepts. Our purpose here is to help teachers to develop an awareness of effective ways to discuss comparisons and causes, as well as some pitfalls to avoid.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

About comparisons:

Many two-way comparisons stem from the design of the experimental activity, that is, things that sink vs. things that float, or liquids exhibiting cohesion vs. liquids exhibiting adhesion. But even when there are more than two things to be compared, you can begin on a two-way level, for clarity and simplicity.

"Now which of the mystery powders contain starch and which do not?"

Make your comparison questions explicit as to which two things are being compared. This is especially important when the discussion, as a whole, involves multiple comparisons.

Unclear:

"Okay, so metal would sink, but wood has a lower density, so would it sink or float?"

More explicit:

"Okay, so metal would sink because it is more dense than water. But wood has a lower density than water, so would it sink or float?"

LEP students need to be aware that questions which include the words **so, if/then, when,** and **because** are important, because they often concern the point of the activity, the connection between what occurred and what caused it:

"So, the ship that's floating is really displacing the water, isn't it?"
"Would it have floated if you had not put the air in?"
"Soapy water flattens out and won't mount up like plain water does, because we said water has what kind of power?"

"Why" questions are a typical way to ask about causes. If a student's response is not at the level of abstraction, guide him/her with the follow-up. Here, for example, the student responds to the "why" question with a description of an experimental procedure, rather than the explanation of the cause behind what was observed.

T: Why did the powder turn purple?
S: Because I added iodine.
T: Okay, and what did this prove?

Help students develop the vocabulary needed for communication about the abstract and concrete levels of science experiments.

- **Concrete** questions/responses include words like: **see, touch, notice, behave,** such as, "What did you see/touch/hear/smell/notice when you...?"

- **Abstract** questions/responses include words like: **principle, example, property, explain, generalize,** for example, "Can you explain/generalize about the principle/property behind what you saw?"

Some words are used to describe both levels, among them: **discover, happen, make, cause.** This is because occurrences and causes can be thought of on both a physical, concrete level and an abstract level of principles, as illustrated by the "why" questions example above. Note also that concrete verbs such as **see** and **show** are frequently used on the abstract level, as synonyms for **understand** and **prove,** respectively. When such words are used in a question (or response), make sure there are other indicators of which level is intended.

Avoid questions which are vague as to level of abstractness, such as, "What happened?" Instead ask, "What happened when you added soapy water to the plain water?" for a concrete description, or, "What happened to the surface tension of the water drop when you added soapy water to it?" for a more abstract explanation.

Capsule 9: CAN THEY APPLY IT?

"If you ask them to apply it at the final stage in some form, then you have a better understanding whether they've learned the concept." (sixth grade teacher)

ISSUE

The kinds of questions teachers ask can help students not only to show that they have really learned the material, but also to extend and strengthen their understanding. Even while students are in the process of learning the basic facts and skills of a subject, teachers can reinforce students' learning of these basics by asking them questions which require them to see connections among facts and to apply factual knowledge to their understanding of their larger world. Unlike factual questions, these "higher cognitive" questions require students to craft their own responses. Higher cognitive questions are thus demanding from both a cognitive and linguistic standpoint; students must not only do some higher level thinking, they must express that thinking using language which has not been "pre-packaged." This does not mean, however, that only the most apt students are ready for higher cognitive questions. Research has shown that all students can develop skills with these more challenging questions, given the opportunity to do so.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

LEP students often face particularly difficult linguistic demands when responding to higher cognitive questions. Techniques which may help include:

- Basing your higher cognitive questions on homework or seatwork, so that students can have more time to think about and compose their responses.

- Giving students practice in asking each other for summaries and explanations by having them conduct review discussions in pairs. This "reciprocal teaching" technique gives them more opportunities to formulate more difficult responses in a less pressured setting. It also trains them to anticipate the kinds of questions teachers might ask, a valuable study habit.

Teachers are often understandably reluctant to put students who are usually unsuccessful responders (native and non-native English speakers alike) on the spot by asking them higher cognitive questions. Comments by the teachers who cooperated with our study indicated that the way the teacher follows up in such cases may be the important issue.

- Encourage the less successful responder with more questions."If I ask a person such as N. (an unsuccessful responder) a question that may be difficult for her to answer, then I accept her answer and add a comment to clarify."

Capsule 10: DO THEY KNOW WHAT A GOOD ANSWER IS?

Question: What makes a good answer to a teacher's question?
"Effective" responder: When your answer is complete and understandable and it shows what you know.
"Unsuccessful" responder: When you pay attention and raise your hand and don't copy somebody.

ISSUE

Children identified by their teachers as "effective" responders knew more about the content characteristics of successful answers than those children identified as "unsuccessful." The "unsuccessful" children were very aware of procedural and interactive features of the good response; for example, not shouting out, waiting your turn, not fooling around. But these children were less able to describe an answer that is correct and shows knowledge.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Make explicit your expectations for a good verbal response. Some of the features of a good response identified in this study are:

- Using the appropriate words (relevant vocabulary)
- Including details and description; being specific
- Giving a complete, well-organized answer
- Giving an on-topic, thoughtful answer, not just guessing; showing you know what you're talking about
- Giving the correct answer

Choose particular features from this list and focus on a different feature each day, asking the children to be attentive to whether answers have the feature. Write the feature on the blackboard to remind all the children and to provide extra support to the LEP students.

Give children practice in making effective responses. Have them work in small groups, asking each other questions about what they have learned. Give them a checklist to rate each other on how well each answer meets the criteria you have established (which might include features from the above list as well as other features you think are important for answers in your classroom). The children can help each other to expand their answers to provide more information.

When a child gives an effective response, indicate to the other children why that response was good. For example,

T: Which would weigh more, a block of metal or a block of wood the same size? Matt?
S: The metal, 'cause the wood floats.
T: Good, you told us your evidence for your answer...

Capsule 11: LET ME ASK THAT ANOTHER WAY

"Sometimes you start to ask something, and you realize that nobody's going to understand it the way you're saying it, and you try to paraphrase it and the kids try to guess what exactly it is you want." (third grade teacher)

ISSUE

Now and then, even the most experienced and skilled teachers find themselves looking at a classroom full of blank or puzzled faces, after having posed what they believed to be an easy and straightforward question. There can be several reasons for this, including the following:

- The question may not have been "framed" adequately.
- The class may be having trouble following the teacher's plan for the discussion as a whole.
- The question may have included a vague reference.
- The question may have included unfamiliar key terms.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO *WHEN* THIS HAPPENS

The difficulty, of course, is that when these problems occur, you must attend to them immediately, without being able to stop to analyze the probable cause. The safest course is to assume that all four factors listed above might be the cause of the confusion. Fortunately, all four factors can be dealt with efficiently by rewording the question, keeping these pointers in mind:

- First, tell the class why you are asking the question, or give some background information, or otherwise link the question specifically to what the students can be expected to know and be thinking about. This addresses the first two problem factors.
- To avoid comprehension problems in the reworded question, be neither too technical, nor too vague. For example, "Did it lack cohesion when it did that, then?" could be rephrased as "Why did the soapy water spread out when you put it on wax paper?"

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO *BEFORE* THIS HAPPENS

To lessen the likelihood of the whole class being confused during verbal reviews,

- Frame the verbal review as a whole, telling the class not only the general topic of discussion, but also something about its scope and organization.
- Plan for the use of "signposts" to make your organization more clear and easier for the class to follow (see Capsule 4, NOW, WHERE WERE WE?).

Have ready a list of synonymous terms, phrases, and descriptions of particularly difficult key concepts used in texts and other instructional materials. The list-making itself could be a good auxiliary instructional activity, with students working in pairs or small groups to compare lists and justify them.

Capsule 12: RESPONDING TO RESPONSES

T: Is that the final answer?
S: No, it's not in simplest form.
T: Now how did you know that?
S: Because they are not even, the numbers are not even.
T: Oh, all right, how would you explain it, Karen? (sixth grade math class)

ISSUE

Verbal reviews are more than sequences of questions and answers. Following the student's response comes the teacher's evaluation of that response. Whatever a teacher says or does following a student's answer is usually interpreted by students as an evaluation of that answer. Students find out what is correct and what the teacher sees as important both in terms of content and in terms of how the content is expressed. Students know that teachers have different styles of evaluating; some almost never reject an answer, preferring instead to focus on the right answer and expand on that, while others are quite animated about both praise and correction. Teachers indicate acceptance by positive statements ("Excellent!", "Terrific!") or more matter-of-fact acceptance ("Right", "Okay", "Yes"), or by repeating the answer, or simply nodding and moving to the next question. Knowing the role of evaluation can help teachers maximize its value during verbal review.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Recognize that evaluation may not always be appropriate. Evaluation can become so automatic that everything students say is evaluated, including opinions, questions, and comments. Evaluation tells students whether their understanding of lesson material is valid, and thus is appropriate when lesson material is being reviewed.

Evaluate appropriately:

- Don't praise a simple calculation or factual recall answer with "Excellent!" or "Great!" Giving praise highlights both the responder and the response, so praising an answer solely to encourage the student who volunteers it may embarrass (or even insult) the responder and may also confuse students about the important points of the discussion.

- Don't leave conflicting or clearly wrong answers unevaluated; be very cautious about assuming that the correct answer is obvious. Rather, follow-up to make sure the class knows how the correct answer was determined. One effective way is for the teacher to work the problem at the board, with the class (in unison) directing the teacher as to the steps to take to correctly solve the problem.

If you turn the evaluation over to students ("What did you think of that answer, Mary?"), make sure it is done generally enough that your most apt responders aren't the only ones doing the evaluating. You can ensure "quality control" by evaluating their evaluations.

Capsule 13: WRAPPING IT UP

"You have to have closure. You have to say, 'Now, this is what we've done'." (third grade teacher)

ISSUE

How the teacher ends a verbal review discussion can either enhance or detract from its educational value. While an un-summarized verbal review may have served its **evaluative** purpose by giving the teacher some notion of how well the lesson material has been learned, it will certainly be less **instructional** than a verbal review with a good summary. Summaries can be oral or written and can be done with the whole class, small groups, or in pairs.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

The summary should relate the foregoing discussion to the knowledge base which the students are in the process of acquiring. This usually means relating the discussion to the purposes and structure of the curriculum unit, or the overall subject. The scope and detail of the summary will, therefore, vary according to the place the lesson material has in the curriculum unit. A good summary will:

- Provide the students with some labels for organizing their knowledge base into manageable "chunks," as in this example:

"Okay. Good thinking. Good work. You had some great ideas on how to make these things float, and what makes them float, and that's what this is all about. Okay. I want you to put all of these things back..."

- Involve students actively in organizing their knowledge base, as in these examples:

"Okay, now, we need to summarize what we've learned today. But first, who can tell me what a summary is?"
"Okay, now that you've finished your assignment, what did you think as far as our objective was concerned?"
"What did you learn from this unit on the behavior of mealworms?"

- Provide teachers and students with an opportunity to co-construct students' developing knowledge base, as in this example, in which the teacher provides the broader labels, but asks students to provide the important details:

"Our first objective was to practice the multiply-add sequence. And your second one was to multiply a two-digit number by a one- digit number, with trading. What are some of the things that you have to know in order to do that successfully? Who can sort of wrap it up for me? Kisha?"

Capsule 14: WHAT IF I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE CHILD'S ENGLISH?

"LEP students have a difficult time explaining what they mean. I have to ask them to repeat it several times because I can't understand the way they run their words together or however it is they're phrasing it." (sixth grade teacher)

ISSUE

Both teachers and students have trouble saying "I don't understand." LEP children will often say they understand something when they really don't, just to avoid extra attention on their language problems. Also, teachers sometimes don't want to say they don't understand for fear of making the child more self-conscious.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

If you have LEP children in your classroom it is important that everyone feels free to say "I don't understand." Without the freedom to admit that communication is not taking place, children will retreat into silence and many more misunderstandings will occur.

Help the LEP children to know what to do when they do not understand the teacher or another classmate. The common response of LEP students in this situation is to pretend that they do understand, when they really do not. This leads to serious problems if the teacher thinks the child understands but is being uncooperative. If in your classroom it is common and acceptable for anyone to say "I don't understand" then you have created an atmosphere that encourages learning. Language is best learned through interaction, and when language proficiency is weak, a great deal of negotiation of meaning between teacher and student is important for further language development.

If you have a large number of LEP students in your class, there may be frequent miscommunication. The class will need to learn verbal routines to understand each child's contributions to the discussion. Have the children practice role-playing these verbal techniques so they become a natural and accepted way to respond to an answer that is not understood. Perhaps a more proficient LEP student can negotiate misunderstandings and act as a tutor when needed.

There are two common techniques used by teachers that are helpful in negotiating with a child to understand meaning. To be most effective, these techniques should be explained to all students in the class, so that everyone expects them and feels comfortable using them.

- Repeat what the student says, with question intonation, to check your comprehension of the answer. Example:

S: Forty-seven
T: Forty-seven? Right,....

- Tell the student you don't understand. ("Sorry, I don't understand; please say it again.")

Capsule 15: DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

"I don't want my teacher to think that I'm stupid; I know I can do that stuff the other kids are doing, but I don't understand the directions. I don't understand what she's saying, but I know I can do it." (third grade LEP student)

ISSUE

The LEP children we interviewed gave us some insights into the problems they face in verbal classroom interaction. They said they are embarrassed to make mistakes, often feel that they are outsiders and feel unable to express what they know. They said they are unable to fully understand classroom communication, and feel that their knowledge may be undervalued.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Rephrase your questions and the answers other children give so that LEP children have more than one opportunity to understand what is said. Such rephrasing is also helpful to other students. Change questions that require full content answers into questions that give the student a simpler choice when you see the child is having trouble understanding. For example,

T: What happened when you added the drops to the powder? (no answer)...Did the powder change color when you added the drops?

Use plenty of visual aids, such as writing on the blackboard or giving demonstrations where possible, to provide more than just an aural channel for comprehension.

Recycle your content so that children have multiple opportunities to understand what is going on in the classroom.

Use synonyms frequently to ensure LEP children's understanding. Specific words commonly known to native speakers may present problems for LEP children. As one teacher put it, "For example in spelling we had trail, and the question was 'What's another word for path?' The native English kids knew that it was trail...the LEP kids knew what a path was but they had no idea what a trail was because they'd learned only one word for this thing."

Have children give directions to each other. For example, when one child is at the blackboard, have another child "talk out" what the child is writing.

Have the children work together in pairs or small groups to complete workbooks, worksheet exercises, and produce "collaborative" responses. Ask them to read the questions together and help each other with spelling and correct terms. Vary the composition of the groups to put LEP and native speakers together sometimes and for LEP children to work together sometimes.

Use comprehension checks such as "OK?" or "Was that clear?" Attempt to establish that the learner is following what is being communicated.

Capsule 16: ASK A SIMPLE QUESTION

"There is a boy (in my class)...who doesn't speak English very well, so (the teacher) doesn't call on him, because he doesn't know what she means." (third grade student)

ISSUE

"Democratizing" class participation is a difficult balancing act indeed! It may be helpful to bear in mind that during the course of a class discussion or verbal review, questions can be posed at varying levels of linguistic sophistication and cognitive demand, offering opportunities for participation to students of varying proficiency levels. Although all students should be given practice in responding to "higher cognitive" questions (see Capsule 9, CAN THEY APPLY IT?), factual recall questions predominate in verbal reviews. Factual recall questions, while relatively undemanding from a cognitive standpoint, can vary considerably in their linguistic difficulty. The following suggestions are intended for teachers of recently mainstreamed "ESL kids," who have learned the basics of English, but are not yet fluent.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Fitting questions to the students' level of English proficiency involves two considerations: the linguistic difficulty level of the question and the linguistic difficulty level of the (appropriate) response. Choice questions, which ask the student to pick the correct answer from alternates given in the question, should be the easiest, since the question contains the answer:

"So, do the heavy things float, or do the heavy things not float?"
"Which is more like a gas: desks in a classroom or leaves blowing?"

However, choice questions which are long and/or structurally complex, or contain unfamiliar words can be linguistically taxing for the non-native English speaking student:

"Which is more like a liquid: a sidewalk with lots of people walking on it, or a crowded elevator?" (The LEP student might confuse elevator with escalator)

"If you could weigh a block of water, and weigh a block of wood that are the same size, which would weigh more?" (The if/then complicates)

The next easiest type of question is the more usual factual recall question, in which the student is required to respond with a calculation, name, date, or other very short factual response. Linguistically, these responses are simple (and often also easy), but the linguistic difficulty level of the question may be a source of comprehension problems for LEP students. Another problem can be inadequate "signposts" indicating the direction of the discussion (see Capsule 4, NOW, WHERE WERE WE?). In such cases,

- Rephrase the question (perhaps as a choice question).
- All of the suggestions given in Capsule 15 (DO YOU UNDERSTAND?) are also pertinent.

Support comprehension by repeating students' answers, while modifying for correction and elaboration as needed. This not only reinforces correct answers, it also helps students to extend their concepts and meanings through listening to your elaboration (see Capsule 14, WHAT IF I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE CHILD'S ENGLISH?).

Capsule 17: WHAT ABOUT GRAMMAR?

"You're looking for ideas, you're not splitting hairs on whether they're saying the English correctly or not, you just want them to make sure that they know what the concept is." (third grade teacher)

ISSUE

Teachers agree that they don't evaluate LEP students' responses according to their English proficiency, but rather according to whether or not their answers are correct. But teachers are also aware that lack of proficiency in English can be seen by others as a lack of intelligence and want to know what they can do to help improve their LEP students' academic oral proficiency.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Focus on the content of what the child says and respond to the meaning, while modeling the correct form. An effective strategy is to repeat what the student said, supplying the correct grammatical form. For example,

S: Did the kids went outside already?
T: Did the kids go outside already? Yes, they did.

S: Some them high.
T: Yes, some of them are high.

Write student responses on the blackboard. This is another technique which allows you to recast the response into appropriate and grammatical forms without giving overt correction. Writing the responses has the additional advantages of reinforcing the information and providing a correct model of the grammatical form. For example,

T: Okay, what did this prove? Juan?
S: If it purple, it's with starch.
T: (writes on board) What did this prove?
If it turned purple, it had starch in it.
If it didn't turn purple, there was no starch in it.

Be realistic about the impact you can have on the LEP student's grammar development. English is acquired slowly through interaction and practice, not solely by memorizing rules. Correcting speech errors only draws attention to the inadequacies of the LEP child and is not likely to help improve his/her grammar. An excellent medium for working on grammar mistakes is writing. Use the child's written work to comment on grammar and focus on what the child is saying, not how he/she says it, during oral reviews.

Use visual aids and have students rephrase their verbal responses. Small groups, including students with varying levels of English proficiency, can be given tasks linked with coursework in science, social studies, etc., which reinforce both academic content learning and grammatical development.

Capsule 18: WHAT IS ACTIVE PARTICIPATION?

"Perhaps we're not always aware of who is responding when we're going through these lessons. Perhaps some other children may be responding much more than I'm aware of." (third grade teacher)

ISSUE

Usually when teachers talk about active participation, they refer to social behaviors such as hand-raising and body orientation. The successful -- and active -- participant also shows good content knowledge by giving full, clear, and correct answers and by using the right words. The goal of many teachers is to foster this sort of "active participation" in all students.

We advocate some caution in this regard because it is ethnocentric to assume that children from all cultures share these conventions for participation: they do not. Moreover, attentive students are developing their listening/thinking skills even though they may not respond correctly or may not offer responses. If active participation is seen only in terms of responding, being able to formulate intelligent questions may not receive appropriate emphasis.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Those children who do not "actively participate" in the sense outlined above may be following different cultural conventions for classroom participation. Learn more about classroom participation in the cultures from which your LEP children come. Some cultures do not value children who volunteer answers or speak out. Your social studies lessons can be a good time to have students "role play" or describe how lessons are conducted in the countries they come from. This can give you (and the whole class) insights into what other cultures consider appropriate classroom behavior.

Remember that LEP children can understand before they are able to speak. Their seemingly passive behavior may mask their active role in attending to and learning from the interaction that is taking place. Listening and reflecting thoughtfully is also an "active" process.

Students should be thought of as more than responders. They should be given opportunities to formulate and initiate questions that they find important. Encouraging students to be questioners allows them to develop a broader range of functional language skills.

Teachers use a variety of question types during verbal reviews. Students must recognize the function of each question type and the appropriate form of the response. These include factual recall questions, which elicit definitions or repetitions, and higher cognitive questions, which elicit predictions, substantiations, opinions, and explanations. Provide your students with opportunities to practice answering questions of different types. For example, you might talk about predicting and show them a variety of forms that might be used to ask them to predict, such as:

"What do you think will happen if...?"
"Can you predict what will happen when you add iodine to powder number 23?"

Capsule 19: WHAT'S EXPECTED HERE?

"When a teacher asks them (LEP children) a question, they just smile." (third grade student)

ISSUE

Children from different cultural backgrounds are socialized to learn according to their cultural traditions. In our educational system, teachers teach by talking and students learn by listening, or they learn through verbal/written interaction with the teacher. In other cultures, children learn by observation and imitation. Therefore, the behaviors of learning are different in different cultures. In this capsule we want to focus on the nonverbal behaviors LEP students bring to classroom interaction and how miscommunication might be avoided when the different meanings of nonverbal behaviors are understood.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Nonverbal behaviors vary from culture to culture. In some cultures, to look at the teacher is considered rude and unacceptable behavior. It is important that teachers understand that the LEP child who exhibits behavior that might be judged as "inattentive or "uncooperative" may be exhibiting appropriate student behavior within the context of his or her own culture. The student must be helped by learning to show behaviors that in our culture are associated with attentiveness and cooperation, adding this new knowledge to his communicative repertoire.

Teachers can help LEP students by making their expectations for posture and other nonverbal behaviors explicit in positive, nonjudgmental ways. American children are very aware of the classroom requirements for nonverbal behavior and are able to talk about them. Discussions with the whole class and role-playing of effective and ineffective nonverbal behaviors can help the culturally different student to understand the values of the American classroom.

Children need time to learn American culture. Give them time. Children cannot change their behavior immediately, but with a focus on appropriate activities -- cooperative peer-peer activities, for example -- positive results will be achieved.

Ask culturally different students to share with you and their classmates how schools are organized in their own countries, how their teachers teach, what behaviors are expected of them, and how teachers signal their expectations. Parents of these students might be invited to talk to the class and share their own experiences. Limited English proficient parents and their children need to feel proud of their own heritage to be motivated to learn and be proud of their new country.